

We Need Some Muscle Over Here!

by Bruce Gilley

Editor's Note: Gilley delivered the following remarks to members of the California Association of Scholars at the University of California at Berkeley Faculty Club on March 16, 2023. He is the treasurer and member of the Board of the National Association of Scholars.

Welcome. It is a pleasure to be attending the first in-person meeting of the California Association of Scholars since COVID. The NAS is reinvesting in affiliates, which are issuing reports and advocating on educational issues in some twenty states. A revived Massachusetts affiliate was formed in 2021, and our new affiliates in Tennessee, Virginia, and Kentucky are making waves. So, it's only fitting that we return here to our venerable old affiliate in California to re-ignite the state chapters that are so important as boots-on-the-ground for NAS.

The Issues at Stake

In a moment, you will hear from CAS member Elizabeth Weiss about her heroic efforts to do her job as an anthropologist at San Jose State University. But let me preface her remarks with a few thoughts on the challenges we face, the

opportunities these present, the successes we have achieved, and the road ahead.

The NAS was founded in 1987 when Ronald Reagan was in the White House and Al Gore was about to invent the Internet. Our founder Steve Balch recalled in *Academic Questions* in 2007 the basic premises of our movement:

Many of us began with a concept of the university that could be most neatly encapsulated by the term, "temple of reason" On this assumption or, more accurately, presumption, our initial strategy was grounded. If the academy had gone astray in the sixties and seventies it was but a momentary lapse that with a bit of suasion and the passage of time would be brought right With revolution's specter exorcised, reason's sweet sovereignty would surely resume its accustomed seat—or so we hoped. On this premise the most important thing was speaking truth, not to power, but to our fellow truth-seekers in the professoriate, who, attending, would mend their ways. What were thus needed were clear restatements of basic principles, well-argued articles and books, pointed letters to the editor, and occasional petitions.

But, to the dismay of our NAS pioneers, the academy was not for listening and by all measures has gone sharply in the opposite direction of reason ever since. As Dr. Balch explained in his article: “Our auditors proved far less the devotees of reason we had imagined them to be. Not only did they have little compunction about the exercise of power, but, in the new spirit of postmodernism, they celebrated its ubiquity.”

I will return to this issue of “the exercise of power” because it is, in my view, ultimately where we ourselves must go in order to correct the abuses in the academy.

And let's be clear that what is at stake here is nothing less than freedom, truth, and beauty in our American society, and how their promotion has made Western countries the greatest sources of human well-being ever. If universities have gone so far astray as Dr. Balch suggests, the question arises whether they should be put under conservatorships given that they have become a liability to these values. We are long past simply quibbling about campus follies because destructive ideas like open borders, modern monetary theory, socialism, digital public infrastructure, stratification economics, race-based preferences and transfers, critical legal theory, gender identity, and much else was born in the higher education lab, not as a lab accident as in Wuhan but as an intentional virus to poison modern liberal societies. And whereas we used to expect bad ideas to be refuted or modified on campus when subjected to debate, critique, and competing

views, the lack of these things today has allowed them to fester.

I wrote recently in *Minding the Campus* of the university-to-government pipeline under the Biden administration and some of the toxic sludge that has passed through it. The hipster FTC commissioner Lina Khan got her inspiration, for instance, from one David Singh Grewal at the Berkeley law school, about eight-hundred feet from where we stand, who preaches the violent and revolutionary overthrow of the American economic system. The wrath of Khan has destroyed billions of dollars of wealth through her ill-conceived assaults on mergers and acquisitions. What if Lina Khan, while at law school, had been exposed to more diversity of thought? Might this damage have been averted?

We know of course that Republicans or conservatives are now essentially extinct on campus. Depending on the department, the ratio of liberals or Democrats to conservatives or Republicans is now typically twenty-five or fifty or infinity to one! Even in California, this is a travesty. After all, Republicans account for about forty percent of votes cast here, versus sixty percent for Democrats. Heck, right here in the twelfth congressional district, ten percent of ballots were cast for the Republican candidate in 2022. If the Berkeley faculty was as intellectually diverse as the voters right here in the twelfth congressional district then there would be only nine Democrats for every Republican.

Our Oregon affiliate released a report in 2021 on campaign donations by faculty and staff at our three major public universities showing that between ninety-six percent and ninety-nine percent of both donors and donations went to Democrats. One of my faculty colleagues shrugged his shoulders. Liberals, he explained, are more likely to choose careers in the academy, and more likely than conservatives to succeed on merit. In any case, he continued, most were professionals who did not impose their personal views on students but exposed them to a wide variety of ideas and allowed them to make up their own minds.

I accept his first claim: Democrats and liberals *are* more attracted to the idea of sitting in ivory towers theorizing about ways to run the world or, as Paul Johnson memorably put it in his 1991 book *Modern Times*, “the notion that people can be shoveled around like concrete.” But to my colleague’s claims that liberals are smarter people in general and that they provide sufficient intellectual pluralism through their own refined intellects: both are demonstrably false. So we do have a problem on our hands.

What Only the NAS Is Doing

Under President Peter Wood, the NAS has been drawing battle lines and taking on the illiberal academy as well as some of the ideas it has spawned into our public sphere—such as the idea that the United States is a racist country, that

American capitalism is a failure, that people need to shut up and listen to the experts, and so on. Dr. Wood has assembled an impressive array of young staff who are making a big impact. John Sailer’s reporting in January of this year on the use of diversity statements to weed out faculty candidates at Texas Tech led to an immediate public backlash and a climbdown by that university. Our work on Confucius Institutes is credited with being the major reason they have been shuttered nationwide. Our new initiative on the crisis of science in the United States is attracting congressional and donor support. And our work at the K-12 level through the Civics Alliance is leading to legislation at the state level.

There are other organizations that pretend to be doing what we do. But they lack our breadth, depth, and our clear-eyed commitment. Most are think tanks rather than membership organizations. We have boots on the ground, feet in the fire, shoe leather pounded away in the quad.

So we’re it, folks: the only major national organization of working scholars in the United States trying, first and foremost, to protect the American body public from the strange ideas coming out of the contemporary academy and, at the same time, trying new ways to restore the promise of the academy.

California and Berkeley

California in general and Berkeley in particular have a central place in this question, both for ill and for good. It’s not just the size of the state—which ac-

counts for fourteen percent of all college students in America, by far the largest of any state—but its well-documented demonstration effects on other states that makes it important. The 1960s campus radicalism is indelibly associated with Berkeley and its ironically named “free speech” movement when totalitarian students used intimidation and violence to silence conservative voices and force their demands on the university.

Among the students gathered in front of Sproul Hall in October 1964 when the gunboat diplomacy of the “free speech” movement began was Dr. Balch. As Dr. Wood wrote in *Academic Questions* in 2009: “You were only twenty, but you looked on the mob commanding the police cruiser as a soap box and saw something that all too few of your contemporaries recognized: a mob determined to overturn freedom in the name of freedom.” Here Balch remained, gaining his Ph.D. in 1972. And although his career was in New York, the seeds of his suspicions about the illiberal turn in the academy were planted right here on the Berkeley campus.

I used to take a ghoulish pride in the fact that on the day I was born in 1966, Mao Zedong announced the formation of the Red Guards from the Tiananmen Square rostrum. But I now learn that Ronald Reagan was on the same day calling for “beatniks, radicals, and filthy speech advocates” on the Berkeley campus to be “taken by the scruff of the neck and thrown off the campus permanently.” I have found my new birth star. The more important point is this: it’s not

just the campus nonsense that began in California, but also the remedy for it, in the form of the Reagan Revolution that brought some sanity back to campus in the 1980s and 1990s. That remedy was embodied in Dr. Balch’s journey from Berkeley graduate student in 1964 to NAS founder in 1987.

The CAS was an important part of this. The CAS and Glynn Custred were prominent in defeating the so-called “Ebonics” language movement of the 1980s, when academics were arguing with a straight face that black students should not be forced to read, write, and speak in standard English. The CAS was arguing alongside the likes of Maya Angelou and John McWhorter, who were charged by radicals with internalized white supremacy.

In 1996, Glynn and Tom Wood drafted Proposition 209, the first ballot initiative against race and gender preferences in government institutions that California voters approved in that year. The previous year, the CAS and Ward Connerly had led the successful campaign to abolish preferences in the UC system. That brought the NAS its first national attention, as well as scrutiny. In a 2019 Ph.D. dissertation in sociology from the University of Michigan, one David Mickey-Pabello accuses the CAS of promoting “laissez-faire racism” through its work against affirmative action, which, the budding young scholar writes, had “disrupted White masculinity.” (Dr. Mickey-Pabello has since fetched up in Harvard Yard promoting race-

based admissions to medical schools.) Ward would be amused!

There were smaller victories as well. Most notably, the CAS forced the University of California to fire its Vice President for Education Outreach, Alex Saragoza, in 2001 after it was revealed that this Berkeley ethnic studies professor had retroactively enrolled two Cal football players in a class for which they did zero work so that they would be eligible to play. At first, the university tried to spin Saragoza's misconduct as overzealous outreach, for which he was being paid the equivalent of \$340,000 a year in today's money. The CAS raised a fuss, and he was forced out of the administrative job, although he held onto his faculty position, a mere 1,000 feet from where we stand. Then-CAS president Hal Pashler pithily summarized the six-month teaching suspension as "a joke." At last report, Professor Saragoza was writing a book on the systemic racism of California's "white dominated, Eurocentric" wine industry.

In 2012, the CAS issued a landmark report entitled *A Crisis of Competence: The Corrupting Effect of Political Activism in the University of California*. Running to eighty-one pages, the report set the standard for what NAS affiliates can achieve. It was a master class in diagnosing problems such as the disappearance of conservative or right-leaning faculty, politicized curricular choices and reading lists, cancellations of campus events, a chill on free expression, and administrative complicity with it all. The report also identified the consequences: infe-

rior education, induced damage to high school education, undermining the upward mobility effects of higher education, the declining legitimacy of academics and academic research in American society, and damage to national cohesion and self-respect.

The choice of "competence" as the title was brilliant. The problem, it argued, was not so much "unfairness" or "bias." Rather, to quote the report, "what is relevant is that such a treatment falls far short of the level of analytical understanding to which academic work aspires." I would put it thus: the problem with the scolds, cancellers, activists, wokesters, SJWs, and diversicrats running the campus nowadays is not so much that they are biased but that they are stupid. They are, to put it more politely, intellectually shallow. After all, isn't this really what draws us as scholars, scientists, intellectuals, and researchers to the NAS? We can get angry and activated by the misuse of public resources for political advocacy, but what really gets us motivated, I think, is the tragic denial to our students and to our citizens of a thoughtful academy that does what thinkers are supposed to do, namely to inquire, to wonder, think critically, to humble oneself, to learn. It's amazing that we are even having this conversation.

The report called upon the Regents of the UC system to make emergency interventions to restore intellectual health, warning that "sooner or later, reform must and will come." That was back in 2012 when the NAS mothership had

the memorable office address “1 Airport Place, Princeton, New Jersey.” Even our most avid supporters could have been forgiven for thinking that we had our heads in the clouds concerning the possibilities of reform in the UC system. The response of the UC Board of Regents president at the time was: “There’s nothing I can do.”

The response of the UC academic senate was to assert that there was “no evidence” for the claims, and that “faculty hiring and advancement processes follow stringent rules that are blind to political inclination.” The president of the UC system, Mark Yudof, chimed in that “the University values many points of view.” Suddenly, the campus status quo was where it’s at.

Dr. Balch pointed to the irony: “When I was at Berkeley back in the mid-sixties,” he wrote, “vocal student opinion was decidedly adversarial when it came to the curriculum or just about anything else...Things seem to have changed. This time round, *The Daily Californian* has chosen editorially to defend the curricular status-quo and the university establishment that stands behind it. In our topsy-turvy era, it’s the California Association of Scholars that has mounted Sproul Hall’s steps to take on both.”

What Is To Be Done?

I wish I could report that since the release of *A Crisis of Competence*, the UC Regents have made stunning interventions to improve academic quality and freedom in the UC system, which as a result is now one of the most intellectu-

ally diverse, robust, and free systems in the country, where roughly equal proportions of Republican and Democrat faculty and students meet in comity and goodwill to seek the true and the beautiful. I wish.

That “sooner or later” seems to lean more and more in the direction of “later” with every passing year. Must reform come?

The lead authors of the CAS report were then-CAS president John Ellis, a former professor of German literature at UC Santa Cruz, and then-CAS chairman Charles Geshekter, a former professor of African history at Cal State Chico. You may know of John Ellis’s 2020 book with Encounter, *The Breakdown of Higher Education: How It Happened, the Damage It Does, and What Can Be Done*. In it, he abandons hopes that universities or their regents can reform themselves, calling instead for an assertion of political control by federal and state governments, like receivership, until universities can be brought out of their intellectual bankruptcy.

This I think is where the NAS is now positioned. Our auditors, to recall Dr. Balch, have become overtly hostile to reason, and now assail ideas like merit, equality, free speech, colorblindness, the rule of law, excellence, and showing up on-time for class as symptoms of “white supremacy.” Recently, the cream of the crop of the nation’s students at Princeton have been demanding an end to the university’s student honor code of 1893 on the grounds that an institution that prohibits lying, cheating, and deceiving

is mirroring the criminal justice system. Since the latter is racist and classist, the former must be as well. I wonder where they got these ideas?

The idea, embodied in the failed Heterodox Academy, that we just needed some gentlemanly remonstrance with the faculty ignored the fact that, as Nathan Cofnas wrote in the December issue of *Academic Questions*, it is a rejection of free speech and a pluralism on views on most subjects that *defines* these faculty nowadays. The academy, including its administrators, is not made up of diligent managers who accidentally make clerical errors in banning certain events or are just too rushed in getting their syllabi put together to include non-left-wing voices. Banning events and force-feeding radical ideology is their stock in trade.

I have argued elsewhere that overt legal and political use of force is the only remedy remaining for universities. Faculty forced to incant diversity oaths or land acknowledgements should sue their universities where possible. Elected leaders should pass laws to demand intellectual pluralism, an end to indoctrination, and bans on mandatory ideological courses unrelated to a field of study. Faculty candidates denied interviews for failing diversity rubrics should file employment commission complaints. Meanwhile, we should use social media and regular media to name and shame the individuals in charge of this.

“I need some muscle over here,” shouted University of Missouri communications professor Melissa Click trying

to prevent a single student journalist from filming a mob demonstration led by faculty radicals. Well, she was just being honest about the coercive elimination of intellectual pluralism, competence, and freedom on campus. It is our job now to get some muscle into the job of restoring those things.

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